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THE FUTURE OF EU-TURKEY RELATIONS:
MAPPING DYNAMICS AND TESTING SCENARIOS

FEUTURE Mid-term Conference

"EU-Turkey Relations: Game (not) over?"

19 October 2017, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB)

Summary

Rapporteur: Betül Sakinir, Funda Tekin

On 19 and 20 October 2017, after 18 months of successful collaboration and joint research, the FEUTURE consortium met with distinguished Turkey experts, stakeholders from Turkey and the EU, the media and a wider interested public at the FEUTURE mid-term conference hosted by the Barcelona Centre for International Relations (CIDOB) in Barcelona.



FEUTURE's mid-term conference was hosted by CIDOB

The 77 participants enjoyed interesting and lively debates. The conference started with a keynote speech by Director-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation of the European Commission, Christian Danielsson, taking stock of the state of the EU-Turkey relationship. This provided an excellent reference point for the two following panel discussions. Sinan Ülgen (EDAM), Angeliki Dimitriadi (ELIAMEP), Funda Tekin (Project Director, CETEUS/CIFE) and Meltem Müftüler-Bac (Sabanci University) engaged in a lively debate on the question "Drivers and brakes in EU-Turkey relations: ever-changing and ever-challenged?" moderated by Barçın Yinanç (Hürriyet Daily News). The contributions tackled the issues of public opinion in Turkey, migration policy, the relevance of the development of European integration as such and the applicability of the EU's enlargement policy as we know it. The results of this discussion also fed into the second panel on "What kind of f(e)uture scenario?" moderated by Piotr Zalewski (The Economist). Nathalie Tocci (Scientific Coordinator, IAI), Javier Nino Peres (EEAS), Nilgün Arisan Eralp (TEPAV) and Katharina Hoffmann (University of St. Gallen) discussed different options of how to frame EU-Turkey relations in the future. In spite of the current



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political debate the general conclusion was that cancelling accession negotiations would not help neither the EU and Turkey nor their relationship. The first day of the conference was concluded by a keynote speech by H.E. Ömer Önhon, Ambassador of Turkey to Spain.

The second day of the conference, 20 October 2017, was dedicated to the project's internal discussions in which researchers deepened their work within the particular Work Packages (Political Drivers, Economic Drivers, Security Drivers, Energy and Climate Drivers, Migration Drivers, Identity and Culture Drivers) and discuss the progress made so far and the steps still to be taken. FEUTURE's mid-term conference was closed by a concluding roundtable summarizing the most likely scenarios of the individual Work Packages and preparing the synthesis on the f(e)uture of the relationship that will be further substantiated by mid 2018.

Detailed report

Rapporteurs: Eva Binkert, Hanna-Lisa Hauge, Betül Sakinir, Anke Schönlau

Welcome and Keynote speech

Eduard Soler i Lecha, host of the conference and leader of FEUTURE's Work Package 'Political Drivers', FEUTURE Project Director **Funda Tekin**, and Scientific Coordinator **Nathalie Tocci** first welcomed the audience as well as the keynote speaker Director-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation of the European Commission, **Christian Danielsson**.



Welcome & Keynote speech: Nathalie Tocci, Christian Danielsson, Funda Tekin, Eduard Soler i Lecha

The speakers gave a brief overview of the project's progress so far. They noted that one and a half years into the project lifetime, FEUTURE has already conducted substantial research and produced many papers but a considerable part of the research and output of course still lied ahead. They emphasized that EU-Turkey relations faced turbulent times and had many crises in their history but also warned from becoming fatalist. After all, Turkey would likely remain one of the most important countries for the European Union. It was stated that the story beneath the relations touched many policy spheres and that FEUTURE's approach to look into different thematic dimensions with



researchers from Turkey, the EU and the neighborhood was therefore well equipped to tackle the moving target of EU-Turkey relations.

It was further pointed out that one could currently not speak of a “business as usual” in EU-Turkey relations. It should however be recognized that the long process of EU-Turkey relations was always marked by ups and downs and that it is important to see the sequence of this. It was stated that while in the beginning of relations for example civil-military relations in Turkey were one issue that was in the focus of attention regarding the political life in Turkey from an EU perspective, this had changed over time. In present times, the arrests of many journalist or the constitutional reform package were cause for concern by the EU. However, it was argued that the EU's efforts in the relationship with Turkey would also in the future be sustainable, also due to Turkey's important geographic position.

It was further indicated that the release of the next progress report on Turkey scheduled for April 2018 would probably lead to another discussion and that in this context, FEUTURE's research and output would be particularly relevant and important.



Full house at CIDOB during FEUTURE's mid-term conference

Following the welcoming remarks and keynote speech, there was time for discussion with the audience. For example, the question was raised which institutional novelties would be imaginable for EU-Turkey relations in the future. Would it be possible to have an institutional framework replacing the accession process but including several areas of cooperation, i.e. modes of differentiated integration? In discussing this aspect, the role of academia and of this project in answering this question and in developing new and possibly better ways of dialogue were stressed.



Panel 1: Drivers and brakes in EU-Turkey relations – ever-changing and ever-challenged?

This first panel was moderated by **Barcin Yinanc**, who works as journalist for Hürriyet Daily News. The panel also included researchers from the project: **Angeliki Dimitriadi** (ELIAMEP), who leads Work Package 'Migration Drivers', Project Director **Funda Tekin** (UzK) and **Sinan Ülgen** (EDAM) who leads the research on Security Drivers in FEUTURE. In addition, the panel featured FEUTURE's Advisory Board member **Meltem Müftüler-Bac**, who is professor at Sabanci University.



Meltem Müftüler-Bac, Angeliki Dimitriadi, Barcin Yinanc, Sinan Ülgen, Funda Tekin

Agreeing with the point raised by previous speakers, it was stressed that EU-Turkey relations had seen ups and downs in the past but that the futures of EU and Turkey were necessarily linked.

The panel also discussed the question of the Turkish public opinion. In this context, recent opinion polls were quoted which show that about 50 percent still support the idea of Turkish EU membership and that these numbers have been very resilient despite the recent turbulences in the relations. Nevertheless, the composition and background of those who are pro-membership had changed. In 2005, voters of the AK Party were almost completely in favour of membership, whereas among the voters of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and of the Republican Peoples Party (CHP) only around 30 percent supported membership at the time. On the contrary, it was reported that today AKP supporters were more skeptic of EU membership than those of the nationalist party and the CHP. The panel discussed whether the reason might be that the current opposition parties considered the EU as driver for democracy in Turkey, e.g. as a partner who addresses issues such as the rule of law.

Another issue discussed by the panel was the “institutional question”. In this context, the question was raised whether the political establishment in Turkey might take into consideration a form of relationship, which could be summed up as “sound relationship with economic advantages”. Because if that was the case, the institutional reflection would actually represent a form of privileged partnership – a concept that had been refused for a long time by the Turkish side.

It was further emphasized that the role of migration in EU-Turkey relations could also not be considered a “business as usual” as it had rather become one of the highest points on the agenda. In this context, it was also pointed out that although the first migration movements started already in



2005, it was not before 2014 that this issue represented one of the key elements of the EU's and EU-Turkey agenda. However, in the most recent past, one could observe that Brussels' focus on the migration issue shifted from Turkey to Libya as the main partner of interest.

The role of the Member States for the future of EU-Turkey relations was also discussed. It was argued during the panel that the election cycles and election campaigns in Member States had proven to be influential drivers or breaks of EU-Turkey relations. The Turkish-German relations, for example, changed (for the worse) in the past year, among others due to the Böhmermann case and the Bundestag's Armenia Resolution. Consequently, the relations with Turkey were also a widely discussed topic during the election campaign. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) even reevaluated its position towards Turkey during the campaign phase and became more critical towards the accession perspective.

It was further argued that the EU had been and still is preoccupied by its own crises and internal challenges. The argument was raised that a new definition of the term *absorption capacity* was necessary. It was stressed that this was, however, not only a question of defining a single term but rather a question of EU's future viability as such. In that context, the point was made that differentiated integration increasingly seemed to be the *modus operandi* for the future. Even in Turkey, the concept of privileged partnership seemed to have become more attractive, or at least an idea that can be thought about. Further, it was pointed out that the upcoming new election cycle in Turkey was also likely become a crucial factor to influence the nearer future of relations.



Stimulating discussions with the audience during the FEUTURE mid-term conference

The panel then moved to more general questions of enlargement and that for a very long time, enlargement had been a successful tool for the EU which had however run out of steam in the recent past. The panelists also discussed the history of EU enlargement and whether the Western Balkans and Turkey could be characterized as "left overs" from the past. It was argued that the "prime time" to integrate Turkey in the EU framework had passed but that this might change again in the future.

Based on these observations, it was concluded that it might be time to discuss new options and develop a model that would however not exclude Turkey from the accession framework altogether. Four areas were stressed that should be in the centre of such an intensification of relations: economic integration, security/counter-terrorism, justice and home affairs/migration as well as energy.

In the discussion with the audience, it was debated whether it could be a risk for the transformative power in Turkey if economic cooperation between the EU and Turkey was intensified without any political criteria or conditionality linked to that. The point was raised that there would indeed be the



risk of cherry-picking, so it needed to be clear that mutual benefits and mutual interests had to be the basis for any model.

The participants were also interested in EU-internal aspects and their influence on the debate on EU-Turkey. One point raised was that “not having its house in order” affected the EU’s leverage towards Turkey negatively, e.g. with a view to authoritarian tendencies in Hungary and Poland. The Brexit on the other hand might not lead to disintegration but to finding another way of association with non-members. It was agreed that the future of the EU will be more differentiated and that this could potentially benefit EU-Turkey relations.

The discussion with the audience also took up the polls in Turkey on the membership support that had been quoted before. Regarding the question what the polls mean for the future of relations, it was argued that there may be two ways to see it: On the one hand, one could see the positive effect of the opposition being more united. On the other hand, the negative effect could be that – given the low probability of progress in the accession process – the anti-EU-rhetoric could increase. Given the change of public opinion in the recent past, it was noted that if the Turkish population perceived the EU as open-hearted to Turkish membership again one day in the future, there would be the potential for the Turkish public opinion to change very fast again.

Panel 2: What kind of f(e)uture scenario?

The second panel was moderated by **Piotr Zalewski** who has been correspondent of The Economist in Turkey since 2016. **Nathalie Tocci** (IAI), Scientific Director of FEUTURE contributed to the panel alongside **Nilgün Arisan Eralp**, EU Director of the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) and member of FEUTURE’s Scientific and Policy Advisory Board, as well as **Javier Nino-Perez**, Head of Division-Turkey at the European External Action Service and **Katharina Hoffmann** from the University of St. Gallen, who is part of the fellow H2020 project *EU-Strat*.

The panel started with a small survey among the audience on who believed that Turkey will become a full EU member in the classical sense. The discussion then centered on the reasons for the skeptical stand which most participants had shown in this question. It was stated that the recent restrictions of the press freedom but also the Cyprus question and the occasionally antagonistic bilateral relations with individual member states of the EU were among the main hurdles. It was further argued that the growing distrust and dropping credibility of the EU itself could also be among the reasons.

Having taken stock of the current situation, the question was raised how the EU and Turkey could move forward from the present impasse and what likely future(s) could be. In this context, it was stressed that the project results so far indicated that a scenario of pure conflict was not likely. The long list of fields of cooperation including security, migration, energy, trade and cultural exchange among many others, proved that the EU-Turkey relationship was not one that could afford to be marked only by conflict. It was argued that we would need to accept the fact that the EU-Turkey relationship was always and will always be marked by change.



The question was asked what the institutional form of a relationship could look like which could capture the “messy” state that EU-Turkey relations have always been in. It was argued that such an institutional framework would, among others, need to capture the constant transformation, the patterns of convergence, cooperation and also conflict. A full membership like Juncker recently outlined in which every member state participates in all areas would not be feasible as this form of membership did not capture the elements of conflict. For Turkey, a different form of membership would be necessary and the fact that the EU is moving towards differentiated structures and forms of membership could therefore be a chance for relations with Turkey. The thought was raised that in that case, given the different character of the aim, there would not be a reason to delay the process any longer.



Nathalie Tocci, Nilgün Arisan Eralp, Piotr Zalewski and Javier Nino-Perez

Furthermore, it was argued that since the FEUTURE project's kick-off conference, a lot had changed in EU Turkey relations and that there were more and more elements of the conflict scenario. At the same time, suspending negotiations talks was not an option, given the continuing interests on both sides. It was argued that the following areas were crucial for cooperation: Customs union, foreign policy, counter-terrorism and energy. However, one could identify problematic issues in many of these fields. For example, the relations lacked mutual trust at the moment, rendering cooperation in foreign policy or security issue improbable.

Another speaker reminded of the shared neighborhood and the potential for cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Caucasus. It was admitted that this region may not be on the top of the agenda but it should not be forgotten due to its importance for the issue of stability. Also, it was stressed that Turkey plays a central role in this area as an important trade partner for the region and as target country of irregular migration. It also had an influence in terms of religion, culture and society, not only because of its Ottoman history. Therefore, it was stated that Turkey is not only crucial in the context of EU-Turkey relations in a narrow sense but also for the purpose of being connected to neighbouring regions also in the East.

The moderator then opened the discussion with the audience. One of the main questions debated was the differentiation between rules-based cooperation and transactional cooperation. An example for the difference between these models would be an inclusion in the Energy Community (as a rules-based cooperation) versus an energy dialogue with Turkey (as a transactional form cooperation). It was



argued that even if there was support from Turkey for going down a rules-based “road”, there would most likely be serious opposition from the Member States. It was agreed also by other speakers that there would be resistance within the EU against a form of institutional inclusion. Again, the point was raised that the negotiation outcome with the UK might create forms of cooperation that could be of relevance for EU-Turkey relations as well.



Ofra Bengion from FEUTURE's Advisory Board contributed to the discussion

A modernized Customs Union could also be a new solution combining the transactional cooperation with a rule-based one, since the European Union is debating whether to link the Customs Union regulations for Turkey with political principles/conditionality. But after all the question remains whether Turkey would accept a revised form of Customs Union.

Lastly, it was discussed whether the EU might decide to make the official end of the accession process a condition for the modernizing of the Customs Union and which effect this could have.

